United Nations A/57/161

General Assembly

Distr.: General
2 July 2002

Original: English

Fifty-seventh session
Item 68 (c) of the preliminary list*
Review and implementation of the Concluding Document of the Twelfth Special Session of the General Assembly

Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

During the period under review, the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa convened its sixteenth and seventeenth ministerial meetings; organized the Subregional Conference on the Protection of Women and Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa and a meeting of Chiefs of Staff of the member States of the Committee; and co-organized with the United Nations Development Fund for Women a regional consultation on the theme "Parity and development: participation of the Central African woman". The Committee, which was established in May 1992, also commemorated the tenth anniversary of its creation. Through its Bureau, it continued to monitor political and security developments in its region.

* A/57/50/Rev.1.

02-46937 (E) 070802

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 56/25 A, entitled "Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa", the General Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed its support for efforts to promote confidence-building measures in order to ease tensions and conflicts and further peace, stability and sustainable development in Central Africa. It also reaffirmed its support for the programme of work of the Committee adopted at its organizational meeting held in Yaoundé from 27 to 31 July 1992 (see A/47/511).

2. By the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1197 (1998), to provide the States members of the Committee with the necessary support for the implementation and smooth functioning of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX) created by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the early-warning mechanism. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the States members of the Committee with assistance to ensure that they are able to carry out their efforts, and requested him to submit to it at its fifty-seventh session a report on the implementation of the resolution.

3. The present report has been prepared in response to that request. It covers the activities undertaken by the United Nations and the Committee since the submission of the previous report (A/56/285).

II. Action by the United Nations

4. During the reporting period, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, which serves as the secretariat of the Committee, continued to provide it with advisory, substantive and technical support. It also continued to cooperate and collaborate with the ECCAS secretariat on matters of mutual interest to the Committee, in particular on questions related to peace and security. Through its Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, the Department has also provided technical support to the national commissions on small arms of some of the States members of the Committee.

III. Meetings of the Committee

5. At its sixteenth ministerial meeting, held from 13 to 17 August 2001 in Kinshasa (see A/56/378-S/2001/890), while reviewing the geopolitical and security situation in its respective member States, the Committee expressed concern at the continuing conflict in Angola and expressed its support for the efforts of the Government of Angola to restore peace, security and stability throughout the territory and to ensure the protection of the civilian population. It called on the international community to assist the displaced persons and invited the União Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola (UNITA) to renounce the pursuit of war and instead promote national reconciliation and peace for the benefit of all Angolans under the terms of the Lusaka Protocol.

6. With regard to the situation in Burundi, the Committee expressed deep concern at the heightened insecurity in that country, in particular the continuation and escalation of the violence being perpetrated against the civilian population by armed groups based in some neighbouring countries. It welcomed the signing of the agreement on a transitional government, and expressed its support for the efforts of the Burundian Government and all Burundians to bring about lasting peace in their country. In addition, it invited the countries of the Central African subregion, particularly those of the Great Lakes Region, to help Burundians to restore peace through dialogue and reconciliation and to refrain from providing any direct or indirect assistance to the rebels.

7. Regarding Cameroon, the Committee welcomed the Government's pursuit of a policy of dialogue through the establishment of a consensus-based democracy that would permit harmonious development in the country. Concerning the situation in the Congo, the Committee welcomed the efforts made by the Congolese Government to promote national reconciliation in that country, in particular the holding in Brazzaville, from March to April 2001, of the all-embracing national dialogue in which all segments of society participated. As to the situations in Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe, the Committee noted with appreciation the climate of peace and stability that existed in those countries.

8. While expressing grave concern at the attempted coup of May 2001, the Committee noted with satisfaction the efforts made by the Central African

Government to fight insecurity and to continue the process of disarmament and the restructuring of the armed forces. With regard to Chad, it expressed concern at the continued armed attacks by the opposition, and encouraged the Chadian authorities to continue pursuing their policy of dialogue and openness towards the opposition in order to bring about national reconciliation among all Chadians. The Committee expressed grave concern at the continued systematic plunder and unlawful exploitation of natural resources and other riches in the occupied part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and demanded the immediate cessation of those practices. It also expressed deep concern at the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in that country, as well as the massive violation of human rights and international humanitarian law being perpetrated in the occupied territories. It urgently appealed to the Security Council to move rapidly with the implementation of phase III of the deployment of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

9. The Subregional Conference on the Protection of Women and Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa, which was held in Kinshasa from 14 to 16 November 2001 (see A/56/680-S/2001/1155), brought together senior government officials and representatives of civil society from the States members of the Committee, as well as representatives of United Nations agencies, donor countries and international organizations. It offered an opportunity for an in-depth, open and direct exchange of views on the extent, implications and consequences of armed conflict, in particular on women and children in Central Africa and society in general. At the same time, it drew the attention of the international community to the plight of the victims of the ongoing armed conflicts in Central Africa. It was seen as an opportunity for the Central African States to develop a plan of action that would assist them to effectively address that problem. Accordingly, the Conference adopted a plan of action that contained a number of recommendations to be implemented at the national, subregional and international levels.

10. The Conference's themes included (a) an analysis of recent or ongoing armed conflicts in central Africa and their impact on women and children; (b) the legal framework and international efforts to protect women and children in situations of armed conflict; (c) the role of women and children in conflicts and peace efforts in central Africa; (d) problems specific to women in armed conflict; and (e) problems specific to children in armed conflict.

11. Participants deplored the proliferation of armed conflicts in the central African region and the disastrous impact they had on the welfare and economic development of the people of central Africa. They identified civil wars and wars of aggression as the two main types of conflicts engulfing the subregion, while struggles for power and control of resources, poor governance, economic interests, ethnic and/or political intolerance, the refusal to abide by democratic principles, poverty, underdevelopment, overpopulation actions of foreign powers and multinational corporations were identified as the causes of those incessant conflicts.

12. After nearly four years of constant postponements, the meeting of Chiefs of Staff of the member States of the Committee was finally held in Libreville from 18 to 20 March 2002. The meeting, whose objective was to reduce the global costs of organizing joint military simulation exercises for peacekeeping operations in the central African region, was a follow-up to a similar meeting held in Libreville on 14 and 15 May 1998. That meeting, which had been called for at a meeting of Defence Ministers of the Member States of the Committee, held in Libreville from 28 to 30 April 1998, had been tasked with considering the practical modalities and determining the global costs of conducting such exercises.

13. Accordingly, at their May 1998 meeting, the Chiefs of Staff had developed a plan and timetable for conducting the exercises. The global costs for the exercises, which had been supposed to involve a total of 1,484 men from the six member States represented at that meeting and to last for a duration of 10 days, had been estimated at 2 billion CFA francs. Those findings had been presented to the tenth ministerial meeting of the Committee, held in Yaoundé from 26 to 30 October 1998. Taking into account the sizeable amount of resources required for organizing the exercises and the fact that member States were not in a position to raise the necessary resources, the ministers had called for another meeting of Chiefs of Staff and tasked it with: (a) reviewing the practical modalities of the "Biyongho 98" military exercises; (b) revising the costs of the exercises downwards; and (c) determining the distribution of the cost among member States of the Committee.

14. At the conclusion of their March 2002 meeting, the Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed the necessity of organizing the military exercises and agreed on the following: (a) the exercises, whose title was changed to Biyongho 2003, should be organized at the level of section/platoon per country to be preceded by an officers' exercise (i.e., nine platoons = three companies = one battalion), at a total cost of nearly 800 million CFA francs (a little above US$ 850,000 or 980,000 euros); (b) the exercises should be held in Gabon in June 2003 and should be called Biyongho 2003; (c) a planning committee should be established, consisting of two participants per country; (d) the planning committee should meet in Libreville in September 2002 and February 2003; and (e) the exercises should be held in June 2003.

15. As far as the distribution of the costs of the exercises was concerned, given the political nature of the issue the Chiefs of Staff were unable to determine each country's share and therefore decided to revert the issue to the ministers for consideration at the seventeenth ministerial meeting. The Chiefs of Staff, however, recommended that the ministers approach their respective Governments and request that funding for the exercises be included in their 2003 budgets. Accordingly, at its seventeenth ministerial meeting, the Committee agreed on the distribution of the costs and member States committed themselves to approaching their respective Governments on the matter, as recommended by the Chiefs of Staff.

16. At its seventeenth ministerial meeting, held in Kinshasa from 22 to 26 April 2002 (see A/57/79-S/2002/551), the Committee had before it two working documents prepared by its secretariat, one on the geopolitical and security situation in central Africa and the other on the review of recommendations and decisions adopted by the Committee from 1992 to 2001. The objective of the latter was to enable the Committee to reflect on its previous recommendations and decisions with a view to determining what had been done, what remained to be done and obstacles towards the realization of the remaining recommendations and decisions.

17. On the geopolitical and security situation in the central African region, while bemoaning continued political strife and persistent armed conflicts that afflicted most of the central African States, the Committee welcomed the recent ceasefire agreement between the Angolan Government and the UNITA rebels; the installation in Burundi, in November 2001, of a transitional government of national unity; and the holding of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, which although not producing the desired results nevertheless permitted the Congolese people to sit together and try to find a peaceful solution to the problem that had nearly disintegrated their country.

18. With regard to the review of recommendations and decisions adopted by the Committee from 1992 to 2000, the Committee decried the fact that apart from the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, which had since become operational under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, none of its other mechanisms were functional. It called upon member States to ratify the instruments creating COPAX and to strengthen the capacity of ECCAS so as to enable it to respond to the needs of the region. It also called upon all member States of the Committee to create national commissions that would follow up on the recommendations and decisions adopted by the Committee.

19. In addition, it considered the reports of the Subregional Conference on the Protection of Women and Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa and the meeting of Chiefs of Staff. In commemoration of the tenth anniversary of its creation, the Committee adopted the Kinshasa Declaration, in which, inter alia, it reaffirmed its commitment to the objectives of its creation as well as to revitalizing and to strengthening the capacity of ECCAS, in particular in the areas of peace and security in the central African region.

20. At the conclusion of its work, the Committee adopted a number of special recommendations, inter alia, that: (a) ECCAS, with the assistance of the secretariat of the Committee, organize a subregional workshop on the implementation, by States members of the Committee and ECCAS, of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects; (b) the Committee, at its eighteenth ministerial meeting, invite the Department of Disarmament Affairs to brief the Committee on the objectives of the United Nations Register on Conventional Arms and the United Nations standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures with a view to encouraging States

members of the Committee to participate in those instruments.

21. The Committee also co-organized with the United Nations Development Fund for Women a regional consultation on the theme "Parity and development: participation of the Central African woman". The consultation, whose primary objective was to elaborate a two-year plan of action that would respond to the various concerns and needs of Central African women in the areas of peace and development, was held in Douala, Cameroon, from 28 to 30 May 2002. Participants included government representatives and representatives of civil society from member States of the Committee. Based on issues of major concern to the Central African women, the themes of the consultation included (a) the feminization of poverty and new technologies; (b) peace and security: the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000); (c) human rights and the fight against HIV/AIDS; (d) good governance and the participation of women in decision-making; and (e) social mobilization.

22. In the area of peace and security, participants identified the following: (a) lack of respect for national and international legal instruments which has resulted in endless conflicts; (b) marginalization of women; and (c) the proliferation and circulation of illicit small arms and light weapons as the three major problems contributing to the insecurity in the Central African region. In order to improve the peace and security situation in the region, they agreed on the need to increase the participation of women in conflict prevention, management, resolution and maintenance of peace.

IV. Programme of activities for 2001-2002

23. It is expected that the full programme of activities for the 2002-2003 period will be elaborated at the eighteenth ministerial meeting, to be held in Bangui from 26 to 30 August 2002.

V. Administrative and financial matters

24. During the period under review, the General Assembly continued to provide funding from the regular budget for the two ministerial meetings, while the Subregional Conference on the Protection of Women and Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa, the meeting of Chiefs of Staff of the member States of the Committee and the regional consultation on the theme "Parity and development: participation of the Central African woman" were financed from the Trust Fund of the Committee. The Trust Fund, which relies on voluntary contributions from Members States, governmental and non-governmental organizations and private individuals, did not receive any contributions during the reporting period. The Secretary-General wishes to appeal to Member States and the international community as a whole to contribute generously to the Trust Fund so as to facilitate the effective implementation of the programme of work of the Committee.

VI. Conclusions and observations

25. **The Committee continues to play a vital role in promoting peace and security in the Central African region. It continues to serve as a forum for regular consultation and exchange of information and suggestions among the member States of ECCAS concerning confidence-building measures that could enhance peace and security in the Central African region, and its States members attach a great value to the continued existence of the Committee.**

26. **Since the establishment of the Committee in 1992, the General Assembly's continued support for the implementation of its activities has led to strengthened and closer cooperation for peace and security between Central African countries. However, much remains to be done if conditions for lasting peace, disarmament and development are to be achieved. It is imperative that the international community continue to lend its political, financial, technical and material support to promoting peace, security, stability and development in the Central African region. For his part, the Secretary-General will continue to provide all the assistance he can.**